September 20th, 2020

Springfield Presbyterian Church

I’m Not Even Sure Anymore What Season We Are In.

The 194th Day of March

**I’m Moving to Canada:**

**And Other Things I’ve Said When I’ve Had Enough.**

1. This is Not What I Signed Up For...

This year, so far, we’ve faced many challenges as a nation. If I were to attempt to name them all, I would miss a few and the sermon would be a list of sadness, rather than a proclamation of the Word. Yet, I do want to acknowledge the anxieties of this world, of this nation, and our communities. While we all face years in our life where there are tremendous personal struggles, this year, we are all facing a battle. You can’t escape it. No place on this earth, no profession, no age, no gender or identity has protected anyone from the hurdles placed before them this year.

And then, another hit, this past Friday night, with the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. I do not want to idolize her, but I do want to commend the fact that she was a great beacon of hope and change and justice in this world. Every time she was knocked down, she came back up again, even if it was really against best medical advisement. She fought for the life and dreams that her mother embodied but could not live to see, and she sought equality for women in this nation throughout her years. She died at age 87, a beautiful life and an incredible legacy, and while I may grieve, I am also glad that she is with God and is no longer in pain.

But, the grief is not alone about her, right? It runs deeper – the grief is a grief of the unknown, of feeling more uncertain in an uncertain world, and when everything was already difficult, her death was one more event to add to our list of difficulties this year.

II. Jonah’s Death With

So, I hear it loud and clear when Jonah has had enough. When Jonah basically tells God that this journey is NOT what he signed up for. In using distinctly clean language, Jonah became angry and said, “Is not this what I said while I still in my own country? Please take my life from me for it is better for me to die than to live.” While that feels a little tantrum-like, I think we would be wise to admit that we’ve all had those moments. We’ve had moments where we’ve looked up to God, more than once or twice and said, “This is not what I signed up for.”

One of my favorite lines that I say to God or friends is, “I’m moving to Canada. I don’t know the politics of Justin Trudeau but he’s a hunk and I know that’s vain, but I’ll just go live my life in some small rural corner of Canada.” I’ve also offered to move to the Faroe Islands, Antarctica, or the planet Mars. There are some points in life where you just feel so stretched and so frustrated that all that makes sense is running, running from the heaviness of the world and the call to live in it.

1. God’s Empathy and God’s Call

But we all know that running away solves the problems for...a little bit, but it isn’t an overall solution. God asks Jonah if it’s really fair for Jonah to be angry, but he looks at this suffering child of his and lets him to escape from the city and sit in a booth he made. God even created a bush to offer shade to Jonah, to give him respite for the time, to provide some space for Jonah to breath and to get some rest. And Jonah was thrilled – he had a bush, he had a booth, he had a place to rest his head and all was going well.

And then God shook him up – he had a worm swallow up the bush and then the sun would beat down on Jonah and Jonah again looks up and says to God, “Just let me die.” And God questions him again – Is it fair for you to be angry? Really? I provided you a bush, you did not create it and you did not put in the labor. Now that you are rested, you see that city down there, there’s more than 120,000 people who are lost and need help.

III. The Freedom of Anger and Respite

What I love about this scene is that God questions Jonah’s anger, but he also provides him space. It comforts me to think, especially in these days, that I can look up to the skies and say, “This is not what I signed up for.” And I can have a complete temper tantrum. In fact – I think temper tantrums are sometimes necessary, a place where we completely just let go and let it out and cry and shout and lose it. There’s something that feels ultimately holy about that experience. And God is going to hold you and me in that experience of falling apart, in fact, trusting God to pick us up when we fall apart is a great act of faithfulness. So 2020 has been hard, lose it – threaten to move to the ends of the earth, have a good argument with God and throw in a few cuss words if you want. God can handle it, there’s no doubt God can deal with our struggle and pain and challenge. If you need to actually go create a booth like Jonah did, or rent an airbnb in the woods for a few days – go, do whatever you need to do to restore your soul, even a little bit.

IV. The Clincher

But here’s the clincher, here’s where it gets tough – because at some point you’ll have to leave that place of anger and do something. God makes the bush wither on Jonah, and he tries to give him a larger perspective, or perhaps a larger call when he says, “Okay, but look at those people in the city who are in need.” Taking care of yourself is important, it is vital to do the work of ministry – but then you have to follow the call. It isn’t up to you to do everything – one of my favorite quotes from the Talmud that I have shared often still remains appropriate, "Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly now, love mercy now, walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.” The truth is there – you do not have the responsibility, the command to complete everything and make this world a better place on your own. In fact, it’s impossible, and that particular level of perfectionism will always let you down. Yet, even though we can’t fix all of 2020’s particular problems or griefs, we are not free to abandon the call though either. You can take a break, you can scream out loud, and you can have a fit – but after that, what comes next for you? What will you do, with your soul, your passion, and your call, to serve God in love and serve God’s people?

V. Where do you go from here?

So, where do we go from here? In a world of grief, where will you make the space and take the time to truly grieve, to have a good yell, to mourn those things you’ve dreamt of and now see dreams delayed. And then, from that space, where will you go? How will you look at the world around you and see where your gifts lie? Will you ask your family and friends to help you, will you let the light of God’s community surround and encourage you? What do you need, after that sacred space of grief, to do good in God’s world?

These are questions we can only answer ourselves, but I pray this week we are all brave enough to start the process. May you know, wherever you are, in this journey of 2020, that the love of God surrounds and envelopes you, and may you know the love of this community that will encourage and challenge you. Amen.